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Legislature votes to ease personal flotation device restrictions

Lansing – Legislation giving parents more flexibility in choosing personal flotation devices for their children was approved by the Michigan Legislature this week, announced Sen. Michelle A. McManus, R-Lake Leelanau.

The legislation allows children under 12 to be outfitted in Type 1, 2, or 3 PFDs when using personal watercraft. Current Michigan law requires all children under age 12 to wear Type 1 or 2 PFDs when using personal watercraft.

“Coast Guard studies have shown that Type 3 PFDs provide adequate protection for children participating in high-speed water sports, including water skiing and using personal watercraft,” McManus said. “This change allows parents more flexibility to choose appropriate flotation devices for their children while ensuring the children are properly protected in the water.”

Some of McManus’s constituents have explained that it is difficult to find Type 1 or 2 PFDs for children under age 12 who weigh more than 90 pounds. Some have paid fines for failing to select the proper PFD for their children.

SB 703 requires the Department of Natural Resources to report to the legislature annually the number of accidents involving personal watercraft and what flotation devices individuals involved were using.

The bill also pushes the sunset of the Personal Watercraft Statute back to March 2012. The statute was to sunset next month.

SB 703 now goes to the governor for consideration.

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